

## Father and Clown

On the Nomenclature of Norwegian Pleasure Craft

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**ABSTRACT** The Norwegian pleasure craft fleet has had a remarkable growth during the last decades. A popular but perhaps too malicious comment to this development is: too much money, lack of seamanship, and peculiar boat names. This paper discusses certain aspects of the naming of modern pleasure boats. The point of departure is the boat as a personal possession (it may even be regarded as a part of the owner's extended self), and the boat's name is seen as a key to a better understanding of the relationship between people and their material possessions. The analysis concentrates upon the expressive aspects of the names, of which emotions, humour and protest are important categories. Central to this discussion is the name as text, the name in a cultural context, and the social role of the name donor – which will often be the role of the loving family father, and sometimes that of the fool.

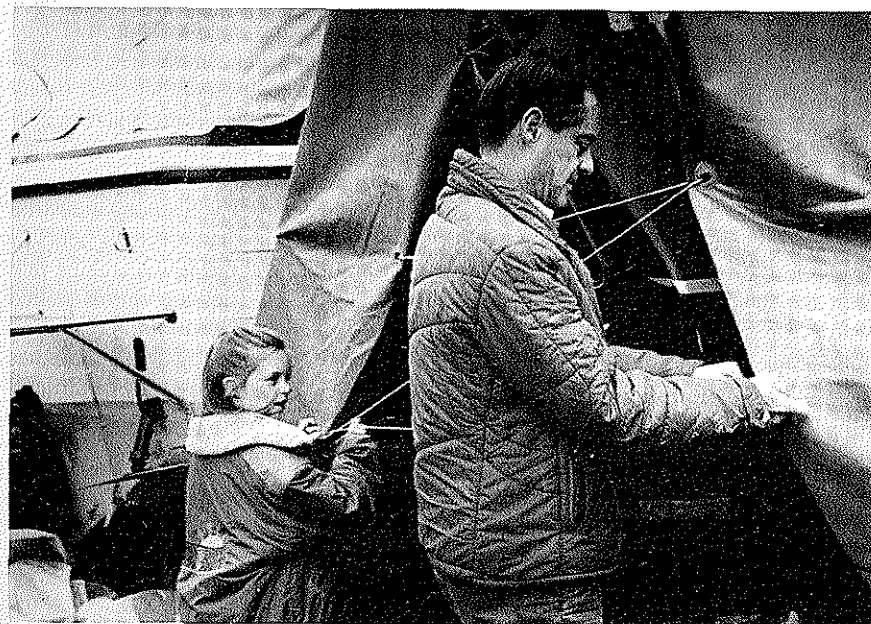
### An Armada of Pleasure Craft

The consumer goods on which the consumer lavishes time, attention and income are charged with cultural meaning. Consumers use this meaning to entirely cultural purposes. They use the meaning of consumer goods to express cultural categories and principles, cultivate ideals, create and sustain lifestyles, construct notions of the self, and create (and survive) cultural change (McCracken 1988:xi).

The coastal line of Norway is rugged and irregular. With all its bays and fjords and myriads of small islands, this coast lends itself to a leisure activity like boating. The islands and peninsulas provide countless inlets and natural harbours, the winds seldom refuse you the opportunity of setting your sails, and the waters are fairly rich on fish. The swimming season is rather short, even on the southern coast, but the boating season normally extends from May until September or even October. Local residents along the coast who have fishing as a pastime activity may keep their small craft on water the year through, but for the owners of pleasure boats winter is a dead season when their cherished objects hibernate on dry land. Around Easter starts the often time-consuming and rather feverish activity of getting the boats ready for the new season – an activity that normally provides occupation for the whole family in all spare hours during a couple of weeks – and in May or early June they are afloat again.

The Norwegian armada of pleasure craft comprises a rich variety of boat types. Amateurs of a steadily diminishing fleet of wooden boats talk disparagingly about the owners of the growing polyester or 'tupper ware' fleet. Devotees of sail nod condescendingly to those who travel by means of gasoline or diesel oil, and supporters of inboard motors turn their backs to noisy outboard'ers. Proud owners of painstakingly

restored veteran vessels, who skilfully exploit even a feeble breeze for their maneuvering, look with disgust at clumsy and spectacular maneuvers from wealthy but inexperienced 'captains' of sumptuous, three-storey flybrigde monsters (presumably



*A family event. Easter time and the unveiling of the boat after hibernation on land (Photo Arthur Sand).*

acquired with money too quickly earned or too easily borrowed). And finally, adherents of classic and solemn boat names give an incredulous stare at flippy or even vulgar names in the stern of some of the newcomers. Or as a reporter recently put it in a newspaper heading: 'Is everything permitted for a boat's name these days?'<sup>1</sup>

For the owner of a wooden yacht, a sailboat or a veteran craft, the boat may become an all-embracing hobby. But even a modern polyester cruiser requires much attention from its owner, and the owner's pride in his<sup>2</sup> treasured boat may be much stronger than the pride in his car. 'When you look around in this place, you'll see that the boats, they are people's babies,' an old watchman commented when I was observing the renovation work on Easter Sunday in a marina just outside Oslo. One should be careful with joking about a person's boat or his seamanship, even if he signals a certain self-irony (for instance through the name), because the boat may function as a part of his extended self. What may be true for a man and his car is all the more true for a man and his boat. And not less important for understanding his concern about his possession: the boat may have cost him much money, often more than his car – the cost of which is far from negligible in Norway. The boat itself may represent a solid investment, and there will be all the fees for anchorage or harbour place in summer and for laying-up during winter, the hoisting and launching every season, membership in yachting or sailing

clubs, radio licences, public taxes, motor services etc. Not to mention all the new and tempting technical equipment that is constantly advertised – from advanced communication and satellite navigation systems, auto pilots, radars and echo sounders, to galley equipment, gas stoves and refrigerators.

For buyers of second-hand boats, and for coastal inhabitants who still stick to their older, traditional types of wooden boats, the investment and costs will normally be reasonable. But for some people, boating has turned out to be a leisure activity beyond their means. The sum of unavoidable expenses – luxurious equipment let apart – may be quite daunting for an average wage earner and family provider, if the boat is a new and costly one and obtained by means of a bank loan, as was very often the case in the unbridled eighties. Some boat names reflect this problem.

Yachting is a century-old pastime for well-to-do Norwegians. Even among industrial workers, the keeping of a simple wooden boat – for fishing in spare evening hours or sailing or motoring on Sundays – has been quite common. But the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s saw a boom in the pleasure boat market. The sale curves soared upwards for comfortable family touring boats and expensive cruisers, yachts and sailing boats. The reasons were manifold. It is a well established fact that Nature has always held a core position in the Norwegian mentality, to a degree that may be difficult to understand for continental Europeans. In our century, the coast has attracted a great part of the population, as a way of getting out in nature. But during the 1960s and 1970s, cabins and summer houses along the coast became extremely expensive and difficult to get hold of, and in most places legislation in the late 1960s had put a stop to the construction of holiday houses within a belt of two hundred meters from the sea. With an expansive national economy, a high rate of inflation and easy access to bank loans, together with a rising standard of living and more spare time, many people chose a boat as an alternative to the unattainable dream of a place of one's own by the seaside; a boat big and comfortable enough to roam the coastal waters and for the whole family to live in during weekends and holidays.

Obviously, the boat was not a summer house substitute for all new boat buyers; there have always been many Norwegians who prefer the freedom of a boat to the more sedentary life in holiday houses. But for all the reasons mentioned above, boating became more popular than ever from the latter half of the 1970s and through the first half of the 1980s. During these years, the boat traffic in the Oslo fjord and along the southern coast was jammed in summer weekends and during the holiday month of July, and near the towns there were long waiting-lists to obtain places for harbouring and laying-up – unless you were willing to pay your way in the 'grey market.' The end of the 1980s saw, however, a decrease in traffic and in other problems related to the boating boom, partly due to economic stagnation, unemployment and restrictions in the financial market. But an obvious reason is also that many novices in seamanship came to realize that life at sea was more demanding and less comfortable than they had imagined beforehand.

All this to say that boating has been, and still is, a very popular sport in Norway, and that boats are regarded as valuable and often cherished objects of possession. But the rapid growth of boating activities and the notable increase in economic investment in pleasure boats have drawn my attention to a very spectacular feature, viz. the naming of the boats. The preceding introduction will serve as a necessary context for the following discussion of motives for the naming of boats.

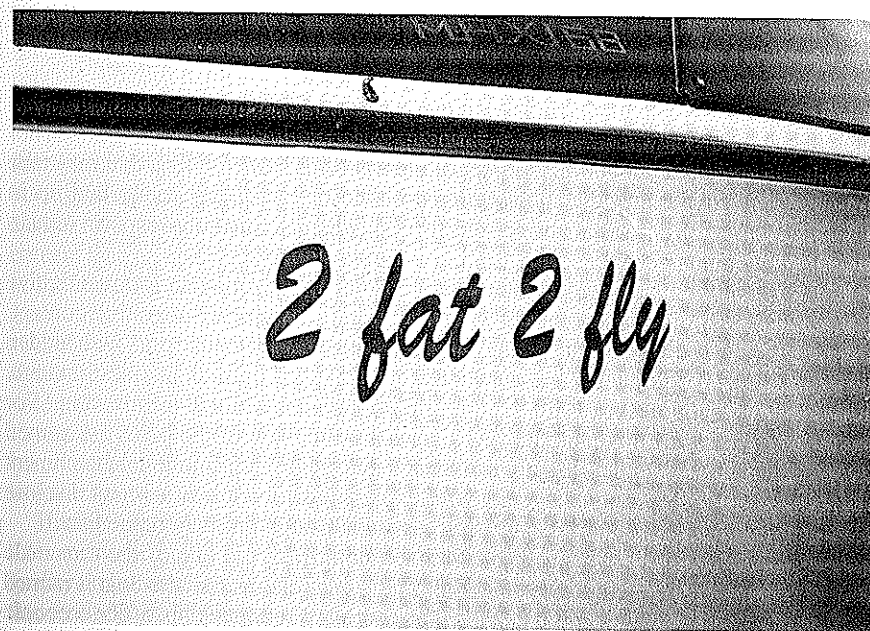
### The Nomenclature – A Brief Account of an Investigation

In 1991 I made an investigation of contemporary and traditional pleasure boat names, based on registers from yachting clubs, maritime radio communication lists, etc.<sup>3</sup> Some of the main findings can briefly be summed up as follows (Rogan 1992a):

... Around the turn of the century, when leisure was a privilege for a social elite and pleasure yachting was still in its infancy, the sailing boats bore names that did not differ very much from the names of the ordinary working boats along the coast. Moreover, most of these 'yachts' were cutters and half-deckers of the same type as the small traditional working boats.

... Around 1890, about half of the pleasure boats bore genuine proper names (male, female, mythological and literary), and the other half appellatives or compounds (noun groups, imperatives, etc.). Female proper nouns were the largest single group, with 23% of all the names. Male proper names were also quite common, with 13%, and mythological names with 11%. Literary names lagged behind, with 3%. Almost without exception, all the proper names were Norwegian names.

The appellatives can be systematized in several small groups, to be skipped here. Descriptive nouns or nouns expressing desired qualities formed one big group of nearly



*2 fat 2 fly. A humorous name for a sailing boat, but what is the meaning? The Maxi is a heavy and solid family sailing boat, not a quick and streamlined ragatta boat – so 'Too fat to fly' gives some sense. Or perhaps the owner is a retired pilot? Only the owner can tell. But such a name certainly gives rise to a chat with other boaters when anchored in the evening (Photo Arthur Sand).*

40%. Among these, the great majority were Norwegian words or expressions, and only a very few in foreign languages (mainly English and French).

When we turn to our own decade, the 1980s, we must distinguish between sailing boats and motor boats, the percentages in brackets referring to motor boats. The number of proper nouns falls considerably, from 50% to 25% (21%). Female proper nouns hold their position for the sailing boats, with 22%, but not for the motor boats (13%). There is an important decrease in male proper nouns, from 13% to 1% (2,5%). A pleasure boat is clearly perceived as a female being, in contrast to the fishing- and working-boat tradition. (For an interesting discussion of femininity and female aspects of boat nomenclature, see Rodgers 1984 and Verrips 1990.) Pet names appear as a new category, mainly for motor boats (4,5%). Mythological names are reduced considerably, from 11% to 2% (1%), whereas literary names, including names from comic strips and television series, hold their feeble position with 3% (2,5%).

Another notable tendency is the rise of foreign names, mainly English ones. Their relative proportion – proper names and appellative expressions seen together – increases from 5% to nearly 30%. One of the most spectacular developments, then, is the internationalization of boat names during the 20th century. This tendency, being a well-known general feature of Norwegian after-war popular culture, hardly calls for lengthy explanations.

As will be seen from the above, there have been certain changes in naming practices in our century. Continuity is a less spectacular phenomenon, but for the sake of balance it should be mentioned that several features show little or no change; people still have a predilection for seabird names, and they still avoid botanical names, etc.

However interesting the above findings may be from a certain point of view, they do not in themselves offer any explanation of motives behind the act of naming boats, nor do they tell us anything about the transfer of ideas, norms and emotions that may take place between people and their possessions. Name research may easily end up in taxonomies based on semantic and lexical criteria, whereas functional aspects remain in the shadow.

Name lists of the types used above, however suitable they may be for quantitative analyses, have serious shortcomings when it comes to exploring cognitive content. Several names, especially among the modern ones, are difficult to interpret, with hidden meanings that only interviews and questionnaires can shed light on. A questionnaire, distributed to boat owners in 1990-91, brought important additional information.<sup>4</sup> For example, a scrutiny of this material revealed that up to 30% of the boats are named after family members, either directly or through acronyms etc. Emotional attachment is one of several interesting categories, and explanations from boat owners disclose motives behind names that will never be accessible through ordinary name lists.

A couple of examples will justify this contention. *Albert* is one of the rare male proper names in my contemporary material. The owner claims that the boat is named after the former lord mayor of Oslo, who was forced to renounce his office a couple of years ago, partly due to the economical impasse he and his cronies had led the town of Oslo into. And the alleged reason for the naming is the following: 'The state of the boat is just as bad as the economy of the town of Oslo.' Boat names like *Nora* and *Irma* are not simply female proper names. They are also acronyms for members of the

owners' families. The names *Grunnen* [*Aground*]<sup>5</sup> and *Søkken* [*The Sinker*] are explained with reference to their owners' previous experiences. Hidden meaning, humour and emotions lurk behind many names, and the examples illustrate the communicative intention. For quite a few boaters, part of the pleasure of boating life is getting into contact with co-boaters, and communication often starts with small talk about the boats – and their names.

### The Boat as Possession, Communication and Ritual. Some Analytical Concepts

... there are few people in contemporary consumer societies who are not the possessors of at least some goods which are seen as extraordinary, mysterious, and emotion-evoking. These goods are not mere commodities. They are invested with special meanings that remove them and set them apart from the everyday items thought to typify marketplace exchanges (Belk 1991:35).

To analyze the symbolic functions of names and naming, a set of technical terms is needed. For some time I have been looking for an analytical approach to this problem (Rogan 1990, 1991). In a recent article (Rogan 1992b) I have proposed a set of three concepts to capture central aspects of the naming of inanimate possessions (boats, houses, cars etc.). Three different aspects are clearly present in any artefact's name, each engaging the owners in a different direction. Firstly, names may be seen as an expression of people's relationship to their material possessions (the singularizing aspect), and secondly to their social surroundings (the expressive or communicative aspect). Thirdly, names and naming may also be understood as a way of relating to forces outside one's control, whether customary practice or metaphysical forces (the ritual aspect).

The first aspect stresses the superiority of the possession compared to other objects of the same class, in its owner's experience. A proper name for your boat marks it out as distinguished and singular – hence the term *singularisation* by naming. When you choose a name for it, you give it a qualitative and evaluative description, with a much richer semantic content than an apersonal and quantitative number for identification purposes. The owner of the boat *Min* [*Mine*] explains the name in this way: 'He was mine among the boats of many other people.' Names like *Egen* [*My own*], *Båten* or *Baaden* [*The Boat*], *Båten Vår* [*Our Boat*], *She's mine* etc. tell the same story. Other names: *Vito* [*The Two Of Us*], *Feeling*, *Empathy*, *Second Dream*, *Second Love*, *Second Union*, *Second Wife*, *Brura* [*The Bride*], *Amor*, *Cher Ami*, *Godnok* [*Good Enough*], *Godvenn* [*Best Friend*], *Kammeraten* [*The Comrade*], *Kompis* [*Chum*], *Guttedrømmen* [*A Boy's Dream*], *Catharsis*, *Endelig* [*Finally*], *Freedom*, *Free Life*, *Happy Days* and many, many more. In these examples, the singularity of the object is broadcasted to the whole world.

But it is important to note that any named object – compared to unnamed ones or objects that are marked only by a quantitative identification – carries this additional element of quality and distinction. And if you give an object a name that recalls good memories, or that reminds you of persons dear to you, you transfer these feelings to the object.

In one way or other, more than half of the boat owners related the names of their boats to their own lives and experiences (memories of childhood, of travels abroad, etc.). The most important single group is names after family members, with as much as 30%. Among these, 12% are proper names (male or female), and the other 18% are

acronyms, anagrams or free constructions based on the names of children, parents or the whole family. A long series of 'impossible' names like *Stetamulik*, *Pjallah*, *Bipho*, etc. combine the initial one or two letters of the names of family members. Also, 'classical' names like *Paros*, *Astrea*, *Empire*, *Bess*, etc. are explained as acronyms for family members. But what if the family expands? In one case, the owner gave the dinghy the name of his newborn son! Another family named the dinghy after their cherished dog. In both cases, the 'family' were together again, on sea as well as on dry land. When we consider all the proper (human) names, male and female, for our respondents' boats, we find that nearly two thirds of all boats with such names (*Ann*, *Anita*, *Cecilie*, *Eva*, *Maria*, etc.) are named after a family member, mostly a wife or a daughter. This is a traditional way of naming boats. What seems to be new, however, compared to our material from the turn of the century, is the use of acronyms and other constructions.

To conclude about the singularity aspect: A favourite possession is marked out as distinguished and singular through a name with which positive sentiments are associated. The dearest among possessions is often given an emotionally tinged name. By materializing your good memories in an object, it becomes an extended part of your self. Not every sort of object is worthy of such an honour, but boats and houses may be.

Secondly, the relationship between the owner and his social surroundings may be studied through the expressive aspect of names. Names are communication, and a boat's name is a person's visiting card at sea. A name is a way of telling the world our preferences, sentiments and opinions. For humorous names, the communicative intention is self-evident. You don't tell jokes to yourself! You hardly give your boat names like *Mors Skrekk* [Mother's Fright] or *Fars Vilje* [Father's Will], *Sexpress* or *Call Girl*, *Ad Undas II* [Go To Pot II], *Svigmors trøst* [Mother-in-law's Consolation], *Holder Kanskje* [Will Perhaps Keep Afloat], *Sea-U-Later*, *Caramba* [Sp. for Damn it all], etc., if you shun contact with your fellow boaters. There is a long series of such names, ranging from the funny to the rather vulgar. A select object for funny names are the dinghys. Names like *Baksmellen* [Smack behind], *Rævedilten* [Arse Toddler], *Den Fordømte Jolla* [The Damn Dinghy], etc. tell how difficult it is to maneuver with a jolly boat in tow. Also, owners frequently make puns that combine the names of the boat and the dinghy, like *White Horse* and *Folungen* [The Colt], *Fant* and *Fantungen* [The Tramp and The Tramp's Kid], *Belåna* and *Kontant* [Mortgaged and Paid Cash], *Rus* and *Bakrus* [Drunkenness and Hangover], etc.

The expressive aspect is not restricted to humour. Another important group contains names communicating emotions, like the family names. Naming the boat after family members is a loud and spectacular message that you love them. And a name that ties together the names of all the children or the whole family, is a strong symbol of family unity. So is also boat names like *Familien* [The Family], *Family Four* and *Family Five*.

The third aspect, called the ritual aspect, involves ritual behaviour on several levels, from simply complying with the social custom of naming boats, houses, etc., via the formal and spectacular act of baptizing boats and even houses and guns, to the belief that the name is a way of securing protection or good luck. The term ritual is to be taken in its broad acceptance, comprising both everyday praxis that has no immediate practical purposes, and religious ceremonies and superstition.

Very many boat names have a normative element: a wish or hope for a safe voyage, for benevolent winds, etc. The name may thus be seen as a sort of insurance that may

be qualified as ritual behaviour. The family names discussed above have a ritual aspect in this particular sense. If you name your boat after the members of your family, you probably express a strong wish that the boat will be a means to keep them together and to realize a dream of a happy family life – at least during holidays.

The act of baptizing boats, and all the conventions associated with this 'rite de passage,' reveals better than anything else the ritual aspects of naming. Even if baptizing and naming traditions tend to weaken among modern pleasure boat owners, one can still observe strong opinions and rules that are not lightheartedly transgressed. A person who is satisfied with his first boat often sticks to the same name for his successive boats, by adding II, III, etc. Within families, such names may go on for generations. Among people who buy secondhand boats, there is a reluctance to change the name – quite often overtly expressed, and sometimes even explained with reference to possible ensuing accidents. My questionnaire material indicates that up to 30% of secondhand boat buyers keep the old name. It even happens that new owners keep names that are acronyms for the former owner's family. But the reverse is also true; a few owners refuse to let the name follow the boat when they sell her. They may sell the boat, but not the good memories; 'My children coined the name. And I couldn't let that name go with the boat. I made the new owner promise that he find another name for her,' one interviewee told me.

Among other traditions still extant, is the reluctance to use botanical names and names of land birds. Several of the respondents mention that a boat should have a seven-letter-name including three A's. The number 7 has been a sacred number from time immemorial, and this tradition probably explains for instance an amazing name like *Caramba* – observed on several Norwegian pleasure boats.

Sailing the seas has always been an insecure project, and traditions survive, whether they be named conventions or rituals. I have not systematically collected material on these topics. There is possibly a more 'modern attitude' among owners of polyester boats than among those who own traditional wooden boats, in addition to regional differences, but these questions remain to be studied.

These three aspects, or symbolic functions – the singularizing, the expressive and the ritual – are not mutually exclusive cultural categories. They are aspects that will be present in any name, and they will overlap. Any boat name implies much more than simply identification of the craft. The identificatory function is hardly present at all when it comes to naming inanimate things. None of the three above functions could possibly be satisfied by a number.

Possessions may transcend ordinary utilitarian status and thereby become 'special' for their owners, states Russel Belk. And he goes on: 'Special possessions have intense symbolic meanings that defy rational explanations and sober reasoning. These meanings may be inexplicable for the owners, but their behaviour involving such possessions makes clear that these are non-ordinary things' (1991:19). Pleasure boats clearly have a number of utilitarian aspects, as have cars and houses and other possessions. But they also carry all these symbolic meanings to their owners. The naming of the boats is a spectacular part of people's 'behaviour involving these possessions.' The names may serve as cues to the symbolic meanings they have invested in the boats, meanings that are perhaps sometimes hidden even to the owners themselves.



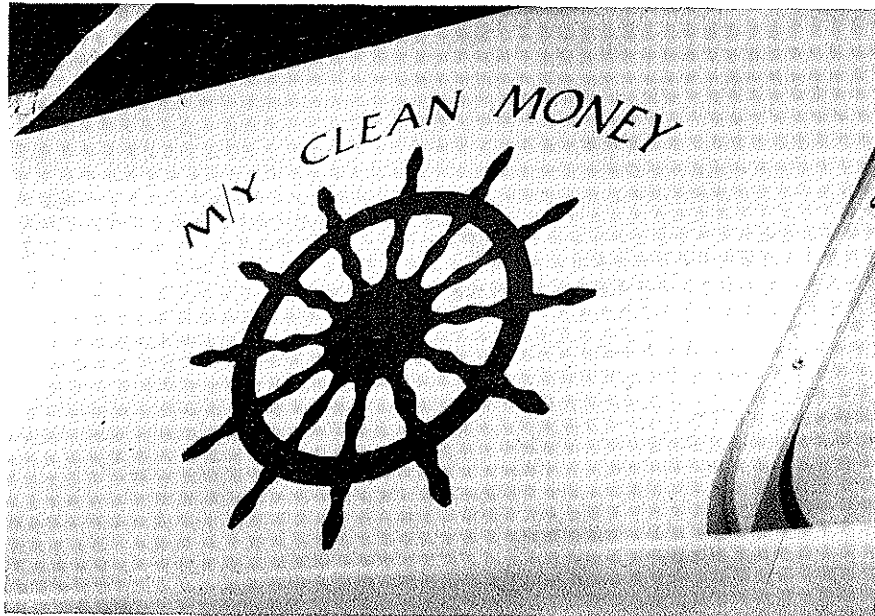
### Definition of a Problem

The preceding paragraphs contain a description of the boating boom of the 1970s and 80s, as a general background, a brief survey of the findings of an investigation of ancient and modern leisure boat names, and a discussion of the main aspects or symbolic functions of naming.

Among the modern name types encountered in the 1980s, the most numerous single group is that of 'family names,' involving approximately one third of all the names. The proposed explanation was that the owners transfer their feelings for their family to the boat, thus telling everyone how much they love their closest relatives, and at the same time expressing a wish – perhaps unconscious – that the boat will be the focus of the family's happiness. Consequently, the boat may be considered an important tool for the family father, as well as an extension of his self.

The investigation also revealed another spectacular group of modern names, the humorous ones. These names must be understood against the general background of the boating boom and the much broader social recruitment during these years. One of the respondents put it this way: 'I am not much of a sailor, and I would find it ridiculous to have a boat with a solemn name. At least as long as my boat does not exceed 20 feet in length ....'

Such attitudes will explain all the humorous names of the prudent and innocent type. But how about the other type of humorous names, on the borderline to vulgarity and



*M/Y Clean Money. The name is perhaps a reaction against names like Black Money, Profit, Credit, etc. Anyway, this motoryacht (M/Y) has been paid with (my) honestly earned money, the owner wants the world to know (Photo Bjarne Rogan).*

indecenty? Actually, one of the most striking features of our corpus of modern boat names is the contrast between the solemn and responsible on the one hand, and the jocular and even vulgar on the other. In short: the loving family father versus the clown.

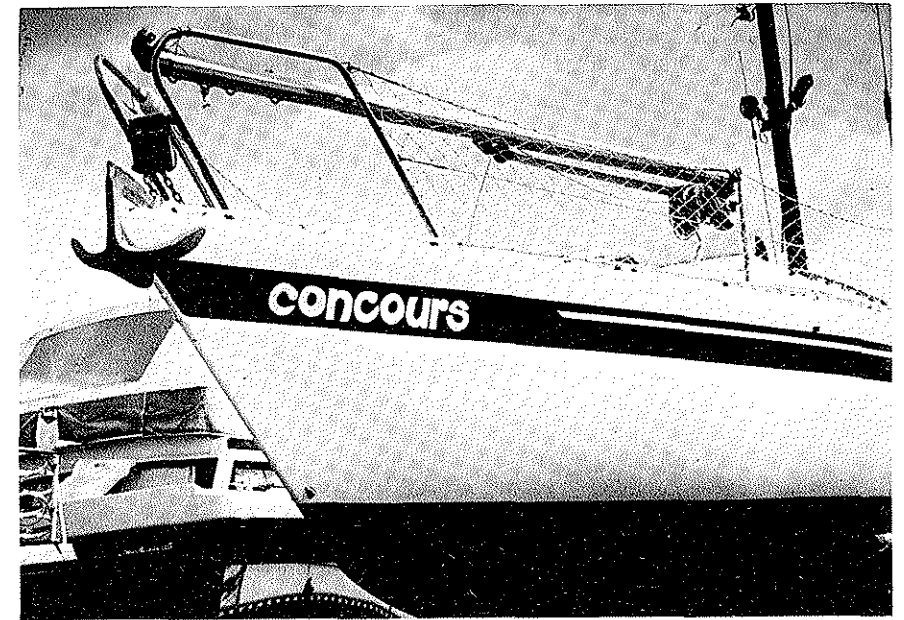
We shall approach this problem through a discussion of humour, its principles and functions. Of our three aspects, only the expressive will be pursued further in this paper.

### Humour I: Reading the Text

Nothing is funny to everyone and anything seems potentially funny to someone (La Fave, Haddad and Maesen, cited after Fine 1983).

Nothing compels the owner of a pleasure craft to give her a name (conventions or other ritual aspects kept apart). A matriculation number satisfies the authorities. Actually, between 10 and 25% of the members of yachting clubs today do not have names for their boats, according to lists and questionnaires. A name is required only if you want a VHF radio licence. But even then, absolutely nothing compels you to make the name visible on the boat. From the point of view of expressivity, painting a name on the stern or on the bow means communicating with other people.

And communication seems to work very well through names. In the questionnaire survey, the respondents were asked to report 'special' boat names (defined as 'amu-



*Concours, one among many humorous names with double meaning. 'Concours' is the French word for competition, but the primary reference is clearly the Norwegian word for bankrupt (Konkurs), meaning that this expensive boat has become a heavy economic burden for the owner. This is a rather common boat name in Norway, with several spelling variants (Konkurs, Kongkurs, etc.) (Photo Bjarne Rogan).*

sing', 'good' or 'bad') that they had come across. Almost the totality of the reported names may be defined as humorous, whether they were approved of or deemed unseemingly or in bad taste. The VHF radio lists confirm that humorous boat-names were very popular in the 1980s.

Why do we laugh at these names, and why do we remember them? To analyze humour, ambiguity and incongruity are two central concepts. Linguists talk in terms of phonological, lexical and semantic ambiguity, and quite a few boat-names may be defined as 'funny' because they have more than one possible meaning. The sail boat *Love for sail* is one example among many. Psychologists, on the other hand, will base their analysis of humour on the notions of incongruity (which implies ambiguity) and resolution. A text or a situation is perceived as humorous if the perceiver detects an incongruity – i.e. if the text or the situation in some way violates his expectations – and he is able to resolve this incongruity, so that the text or the situation is seen to be sensible when viewed in the appropriate way. The resolution of a perplexing situation involves a decrease in arousal that is felt as pleasure (Pepicello & Weisberg 1991).

Many boat names may be analyzed as 'texts.' *Lazy Gale*, *Dronning Lars* [*Queen Lawrence*], *Dansketind* [*Danish Mountain Peak*], *Fantelady* [*Tramp Lady*] ... are more or less funny because the two elements of the names are semantically incongruent.

Very often, it is not the name in itself that is funny, but the incongruity springs from an unexpected combination of a name and its reference, i.e. the boat. Typical examples are small boats with *Titan* or *Giant* as part of the name, tiny dinghys named *Queen Elisabeth*, etc., or old wrecks named after famous passenger liners. We may perhaps speak in terms of an 'extended text,' which includes the name and the boat.

Incongruity, then, may be due to the situation. Such situational incongruity will also cover the countless examples from our modern pleasure boat fleet where people have chosen names squarely unsuitable for boats according to conventions and maritime traditions. The names may be product designations, like *Cheddar*, *Blue Bayou*, *Jogurt* [*Yoghurt*], *Cream Cracker*, *Valium* [*a sedative*], or products like *Garlic*, *Curare*, *Kokfesk* [dialect for 'Boiled Fish'], *Lutefisken* [*a very special fish dish*]. Other curious names: *Cigarettes*, *Women and Wine*, or *Sexy*, *Bonden* [*The Farmer*], *Holy Cow*, *Dagros* [*a typical cow name*], *Guess Who*, *Crazy*, *Still Crazy*, *Skrullingen* [*The Fool*], *Ambivalentia*, *Stradivarius*, *Backlash*, *Behå* [*Bra*] (probably a catamaran!), *Fertility*, *Pregnancia*, *Half a Kingdom*, *Kræs* [*Crash*], *Skilsmissen* [*The Divorce*] ... The above examples are mainly from the public VHF catalogue, and pages may be filled with such strange names.

Among the humorous names in the questionnaire material, the two largest subgroups are names telling how the boat was financed, and names referring to drinking and alcohol. Together they count grosso modo half of the reported names.<sup>6</sup> The VHF radio lists confirm that these names became quite popular in the 1980s, even if they are less numerous than other types of humorous names. In fact, the 'finance' and 'drinking' names hardly represent more than 1%, roughly estimated, of all the boat names in the radio lists. What is important, however, is that it is these names that are observed, remembered and retold. They have a very high expressive potential.

Among the names telling how the boat was financed, we find a series of 'Costa-names,' which profit from the same homophony as in English (Norw. *koste* = Eng. *cost*). The origin is to be found in Mediterranean topographic names. The three most common

names are *Costa Nok* [*Cost Enough*], *Costa Plenty* and *Costa Meer* [*Cost More*]. As a parallel to these, we find names like *Armoden* [*Poverty*], *Arven* [*The Inheritance*], *Avdraga* [*The Installments*], *Banco*, *Banken* [*The Bank*], *Bankens* [*The Bank's*], *Bankerott* [*Bankrupt*], *Belåna* [*Mortgaged*], *Betalt* [*Paid*], *Black Money*, *Cash*, *Cash Flow*, *Conkurs* [*Bankrupt*], *Crita* [*On Credit*], *Debitor* [*Debtor*], *Dollar*, *Egenkapitalen* [*Holding Capital*], *Ekstrajobben* [*Money earned on the side*], *Forsakelsen* [*The Renunciation*], *Gevinst* [*Profit*], *Gevinsten* [*The Prize*], *Gjelda* [*The Debt*], *Heltblakk* [*Completely Broke*], *Innsatsen* [*The Stake*], *Jackpot*, *Kostelig* [*Expensive*], *Kreditt* [*On Credit*], *M/K Lån* [*M/C Loan*], *Over Evne* [*Beyond Means*], *Raka-Fant* [*Stone Broke*], *Ruin*, *Rå Dyr* [*Exorbitant Price*], *Skatten* [*The Taxes*], *Spekulator* [*Speculator*], *Spleis* [*Gone Dutch*], *Studielånet* [*The Student Loan*], *Takk Banken* [*Thanks to the Bank*], *Tom Peng Pung* [*Empty Wallet*], *Utgiften* [*The Expenditure*] ... There seems to be no end to the row of imaginative financing names. Also, several of these names have a double meaning in Norwegian, and thus present ambiguity on the linguistic level, in addition to the situational incongruity.

Of names referring to wine, liquor and drinks, the following have been reported: *Aqua Vita*, *Black Label*, *Black'n White*, *Bloody Mary*, *Blue Nun*, *Brandy*, *Campari*, *Captain Morgan* [*a rum*], *Chianti*, *Chivas Regal*, *Cocktail*, *Cognac*, *Cutty Sark*, *Double Whisky*, *Dry Martini*, *Dry Sack*, *Four Roses*, *Gammel Reserve* [*an aquavit*], *Grand Charm* [*a sparkling wine*], *Kalinka* [*a vodka*], *Koskenkorva*, *Old Smuggler*, *Pilsen* [*The Pilsner*], *Rioja*, *Sangria*, *Screwdriver*, *Sherry*, *Southern Comfort*, *Tequila*, *Upper Ten* [*a whisky blend*], *White Horse*, ... Other names in the same vein: *Alco*, *Alkoline*, *Bonski* [*Bottoms Up*], *Pilsnerfjord*, *Pilsine*, *Ølekspressen* [*The Beer Ex-*



Whisky. A name that hardly needs any comment (Photo Bjarne Rogan).

press], Øljford, Karken [The Moonshine Booze], Pjallen [The Drink], Toddy, Long-drink, Hangover, ... It goes without saying that the attitudes to these names vary: some observers take offense or find them unseemingly, the majority seem to be neutral or accepting, and many find them amusing. But they all remember them and talk about them.

## Humour II: Cultural Context and Social Roles

Humor itself is a kind of bridge, a passage by incongruity from one view to another which society provides as an escape from the crushing weight of traditions or the painful anxiety developed by conflicting loyalties. In humor we travel incognito, so to speak. The serious, pious, majestic self can become merry, impious, and wise. Such transfigurations of role within the self, as well as between the self and others, are changes of identity (Duncan 1968:257).

If we consider these names in an 'extended text' perspective, we may say that they will often be perceived as funny (or offensive) because of the incongruity between the name and the object. But the incongruity aspect alone cannot tell us why many people have chosen these names for communicating.

Communication and humour will always imply a social relationship. Or, as a sociologist will put it, humour is socially situated, like all interpersonal behaviour. Humour must be appropriate to the normative properties of the more general social circumstances (Fine 1983). To better understand the choice of peculiar boat names and their popularity in the 1980s, we must look beyond the text, to the social and cultural context.

The principal goals of humour are said to be threefold: group cohesion, intergroup conflict and social control. This is certainly a fruitful way of understanding the social functions of humour. But in the case of boat names (which seldom imply ethnic jokes, subgroup identity, etc.), it will probably be more rewarding to stress another sociological approach, viz. looking at humour in terms of the social roles of the owners. As our starting point was the boat as a possession and an extension of the owner's self, the role aspect may offer a cue.

In the 1890s, the nomenclature of the pleasure boats was characterized by sober attitudes, compliant to the moral standards of the establishment, who formed the small elite of pleasure boat owners of the day. The names also conformed to boat name traditions along the coast, i.e. to the norms of a population for whom boating represented no amusement but serious business. Emotionally tinged names certainly existed, together with names expressing hope for a safe journey and perhaps also for a prosperous future. But humorous names hardly existed, and 'financial' names or flippy or vulgar names were inconceivable.

The social and cultural context of the 1980s has not changed totally. Contemporary pleasure craft milieu comprises traditional family touring activities, as well as traditional name types. The best proof is in all the names demonstrating reverence for the family, an attitude that the bourgeois fathers of the 19th century would have applauded. Emotions seem to be more overtly expressed today, through all the acronyms including the children, names stressing the word 'family,' a long series of names expressing notions like happiness, harmony, love, extacy, freedom, catharsis, etc.

But the pleasure craft milieu of today is characterized by a very broad social recruitment, and humour has come to be accepted as a normal category of boat names.

In the 1980s we also find more unbridled groups of the type 'much money and less seamanship', as described in the introduction, who seemingly try to escape from the crushing weight of traditions – at least in matters of naming – and this setting even allows 'vulgar' and 'bad taste' names. Sex entered the nomenclature of pleasure boats, and so did four-letter-words, alcohol and money – types of names that were taboo in the old bourgeois nomenclature.

Admittedly, a high percentage of contemporary boat-owners have chosen inoffensive humorous names of various kinds. But 'bad taste'-names are cited and commented upon by everyone, though only about 1% have chosen such names for their own boats. This brings us to the social roles of this minority of name donors.

Within most societies, states Fine (1983), there are roles or positions that are conducive to the display performance of humour. Some people are allowed to joke, and some even expected to joke. These persons have a long history in Europe, ranging from the fools of medieval courts to our circus clowns. According to Fine, there are four such roles commonly encountered in western culture: the fool, the clown, the joker and the comedian. These roles will often overlap, and I shall not try to distinguish between them, but only point out some characteristics that make it reasonable to consider an interpretation in this direction.



*Gin and Tonic. The owner of this expensive motoryacht clearly accepts to play the role of the social fool. A name like this will be taken as an offense by some, and admired by others. As stated above, nothing is funny to everyone and anything seems potentially funny to someone (Photo Arthur Sand).*

### Humour III: The clown and the joker

The fool can be the embodiment of each man's wish to escape from the full burden of responsibility which he carries (Daniels and Daniels 1964:227).

The central idea is that the joker or fool have a 'licensed freedom,' and he is a tolerated deviant type. He must be willing to be the target of laughter, but in general, he is also admired for what he can say and get away with without being punished. He may do and say foolish things, for instance give his boat an idiotic name. He may name his boat *Black Money*, and thus express a more or less common discontent with our tax system. Such discontent was especially strong among the yuppies of the unbridled 1980s. This name is an overt insult to our tax authorities, but the owner will get away with it, because any tax commissioner will think it futile (and below his dignity) to start investigations about the financial transactions behind the investment. Some observers find such names far too much on the parvenu side, but very many people would laugh sympathetically and wish the owner good luck in his private war against the authorities.

Even more amusement and tacit sympathy would result from the rather coarse names *Ruin*, *Beyond Means*, *Bankrupt*, *Stone Broke*, etc., because many middle class boat owners will feel that these names mirror their own situation. A person may name his first boat *Costa Nock* and his next *Costa Mehr*, as one of my respondents did, with this explanation: 'Boats have become far too expensive ... I can mention many such names. Boat owners express their protests in this manner. Everyone thinks that prices are artificially high, hence those crazy names. None of these names is suitable for boats, nor are mine.' Actually, very few persons will disgrace their own dear possessions by ribald pecuniary names, but they appreciate the fact that some have the guts to speak out.

Boat names that allude to wine, liquor and drunkenness will normally be perceived as even more coarse and indecent, for several reasons. In the eyes of responsible seafarers, traffic at sea is incompatible with alcohol. But too much responsibility may be felt as a burden, and an outspoken enfant terrible – giving his boat a 'boozy' name – may become an object of secret admiration. Furthermore, the merry social set of the 1980s that could afford expensive pleasure boats, would normally have very liberal attitudes to alcohol and be strongly opposed to the prohibitive policy of the national authorities, and even more, to the traditional tee-totalitarianism that dominates our southern and western coasts.<sup>7</sup> These boat names will normally be understood as a protest against the alcohol monopoly and price policy of the State, and as an aggressive kick below the belt for the prohibitionists. Only one in several hundred will play the clown and paint *Black Label*, *Old Smuggler* or *Koskenkorva* on his boat. But very many co-boaters appreciate his indecency and buffoonery (and social courage?). A fool or a clown may have conspicuous functions as an outlet for aggressive tension, and many Norwegians certainly become a trifling aggressive when they feel that the price of the bottle becomes exorbitant or the pub closes too early at night. In matters of alcohol policy, it is the 'cultural order' that reigns, through a series of national and local regulations. But in the harbours, it is 'natural disorder,' in the form of popular irony, that rules. That is why these boats names are so willingly reported and commented upon, even if they are far from numerous.

Institutionalized clowning is well developed in all major cultures. Every kind of society seems to find fool types useful in sublimation of aggression, relief from routine and discipline, control by ridicule, and unification through 'communion of laughter,' states the sociologist Klapp (1962:69). As he sees it, people are what they laugh at, and the fool may reveal our national character. There has seldom been uttered a truer word about Norwegians and alcohol jokes. For many Norwegians, anything that has to do with alcohol – and not least boat names referring to drinking – seems to be funny, thanks to prices and restrictions.

### Between Cultural Order and Natural Disorder

The clown – to close this discussion – is mediating between cultural order and natural disorder.

The majority of our modern leisure boat names are in harmony with the ruling ideology of society. For most boat owners, conventions and cultural order determine the choice of boat names. For them, the boat is normally an important possession that deserves a select name. And a family father will often name one of his dearest possessions after his dear family. By materializing his good memories into the object, it becomes an extended part of the owner's self.

But the cultural order may also become a burden and a responsibility from which the ordinary boat owner sometimes wishes to escape. Ninety-nine percent never actually try. But perhaps one in a hundred will. In our culture he is the clown. Publicly, he will be rebuked or laughed at. But quite a few observers – family fathers included – will admire him in secret. Why else would so many respondents – themselves owners of boats bearing names reflecting cultural order – report long series of boat names characterized by natural disorder, without taking offense? And how to explain otherwise that as many as 14 pleasure boats<sup>8</sup> – according to the VHF catalogue – actually bear the names of *Bajas* or *Bajazzo*, meaning *Clown*?

### Notes

1. Citation from a Swedish newspaper. The situation described above is not unknown in our neighbour country.
2. Not every boat owner is a male person. But the majority of men among the owners is so overwhelming that I take the liberty of writing *he* and *his*, instead of *he/she* and *his/her*.
3. I have used membership lists from yachting clubs, radio and communication lists, etc. The comparative study is based on lists from the same yacht club around 1890 (about 120 names) and around 1980 (about 850 names). Cited names are drawn from all types of lists from the 1980s, including maritime radio lists (some 30,-40,000 names), and also from questionnaires (see below). Citations with motive explanations are from the questionnaires.
4. In 1991 a questionnaire was distributed to pleasure boat owners in four different regions of Norway (south, centre, west and north). Around 340 of 1200 questionnaires were returned to us, with information about the owner's boat and its name. The most important data received in this campaign were the owners' own explanations of naming motives, their attitudes to different types of names, lists of observed names



('good' and 'bad' names, etc.), and reports on naming practices, baptism, etc. In total, some 2,000 names were reported and/or commented upon.

5. All cited boat names in *italic* style. Translations of Norwegian appellative names are rendered in square brackets [ ].

6. I.e. not for the respondents' own boats, but the boat names reported and/or commented upon by the respondents.

7. Also, young boat owners will probably oppose the elder generation through such names, but the material is so small to allow a further discussion of this topic.

8. The VHF radio catalogue (1988) lists 14, but there are probably several other *Bajas* without radio communication equipment.

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## A Capitalist Fisheries Co-operative: A Bulgarian Innovation

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**ABSTRACT** Eastern Europe is now experiencing turbulent times. Old institutions are being dismantled, a pluralist political system is appearing, market mechanisms are introduced to replace centralist 'command' economies, and state firms are privatized. The future of the co-operative sector is now a political issue in several Eastern European countries. Does privatization mean the liquidation of co-ops or simply a more favourable environment for exercising co-op management? In this paper we view the new situation from the perspective of one Bulgarian fisheries co-operative. We describe how the co-op is coping with the old regime. We also detail its hopes and aspirations for the future.

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Privatization is now, more or less, under way in most Eastern European countries. The central state is loosening its grip on the economy. Prices are left to market forces. State enterprises are sold, the family farm is reintroduced, and confiscated land is given back to the original owners.

Many Western observers have noted that there is a tendency to go from one extreme to the other. At present, the market mechanism is seen as a panacea for most, if not all, problems of the economy. Collective institutions have been so discredited under communist rule, that they have lost all legitimacy.

If this is, in fact, the case, one wonders what is going to happen to the co-operative sector in Eastern Europe. Co-operatives were well established long before the communist take-over and have survived, to some extent, up to this day. Will the co-operatives be strengthened or transformed? Or, will they go down the drain together with the state corporate system? The role and status of the co-operative form of organization is now a matter of debate in many Eastern European countries, and the outcomes remain to be seen. In this paper we suggest that the future of co-ops in Eastern Europe depends on the answer to the question: Are co-ops by nature (mostly) public or private enterprises?

By definition, co-operatives are neither public nor private, but contain elements of both. As noted by Otnes:

They oppose capitalist firms, as co-ops are aiming for the maximization neither of profit nor of turnover. They oppose socialist enterprises, since co-ops are aiming merely for a more egalitarian distribution of profit, not for its abolition (1988:126).